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Chiengmai and the Inception of an Administrative Centralization Policy in Siam (II)

by

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It is during this breathing-space in relations with France between 1867 and 1885 that Siam's relations with Chiengmai feature so strongly. But to assess how the Siamese utilized this period, it is necessary initially to consider the wider aspects: how did the Siamese now view the West, and how far was their view changing?

In simple territorial terms, the Siamese clearly had reason to fear the French, and even, at times, to suspect the British. But as Jacobs has clearly shown,⁹⁴⁾ the Western impact in its broadest aspects constituted a challenge to the very fabric of Siamese society. The Siamese who had mattered politically hitherto, had been the ruling elite, bound together by ties of personal loyalty, patronage, and marriage links. Social mobility had been by no means completely absent; the five generation rule in time reduced even the descendants of Kings to the status of commoners, perhaps even peasants if they were not meanwhile saved by some new official appointment. Conversely, men of ability, even of relatively humble origin, were encouraged to focus their ambitions on entry into and promotion through the elite class. Success in war for individual Siamese, and in commerce and tax-collection for alien immigrants, seem to have been the most common initial qualifications, and some of the leading nineteenth century officials emerged in this way.⁹⁵⁾

Nevertheless, it is also true that certain senior offices remained dominated by members of two or three official families for periods measured in centuries, families which even managed to bridge the Ayuthya-Bangkok interregnum.⁹⁶⁾ Over the years they had competed against each other, sometimes to the advantage of one, sometimes to that of another. In the latter days of Ayuthya, they had featured more often as senior clients of leading Princes.⁹⁷⁾ When, in the early Bangkok period, attempts were

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94) N. Jacobs, *Modernization without Development: Thailand, an Asian Case Study*. 1971. esp. 320.

95) For example, To, the effective founder of the Kalyanamit family, ultimately *Chaophraya* Nikorabodin, Fourth Reign Minister of the North, after a leading military role in the campaigns in Laos and Cambodia in the 1830's and 1840's; or the subsequent *Chaophraya Phonlathep* of the Fifth Reign, Phum Sichaiyan, son of a Chinese tax-collector of the Third Reign.

96) D. K. Wyatt, "Family Politics in Thailand," *JSEAH*, IX (1968), 208-28.

97) Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873*. Cornell Data Paper, 1969. 56-66.

made to circumscribe the over-mighty Princes, these families were used, in particular by Rama II, as counterweights to such an extent that they soon came largely to supersede their erstwhile patrons. And although, as we have seen, it was the Western challenge that raised up the Bunnags above all others, simultaneously, it also discouraged the other families from displaying their jealousy too openly. That they did not, moreover, would seem to argue all the more the strength of their general loyalty to group, or class, or very culture. They had no more sympathy with the ideas of equality of opportunity or maximization of ability that the West was taking East than had their recent successors. One's superiors were one's betters, and loyalty to them as long as they too continued to respect and maintain the system, was invariably unquestioning.

But the West was threatening other, more practical changes. As mentioned above, trade with the West still grew relatively slowly after 1855, and remained largely concentrated, initially, on Bangkok.⁹⁸⁾ Merchant-houses were established, and rice-mills set up, but the activities of their organizers, and their impact on the populace at large could be fairly effectively overseen by the large concentration of officialdom in the Capital. The same applied with the missionary organizations. A crisis only loomed when, in the 1860's, as the Siamese had long feared, merchants and missionaries began to attempt to extend their operations to even the most remote provinces and dependencies. Wherever they went, they would require adequate police protection, equally from the lawless, dacoit elements that must always have existed in such a thinly populated country, and from the local people who simply took offence at their words or behaviour. The merchants would require complete freedom to buy and sell all but the very few commodities prohibited by the Bowring Treaty, something never before permitted to local or Asian alien commercial interests, whose success had equally always depended upon working in with the provincial governors or their subordinates. The missionaries would expect to be allowed, even aided to construct churches, schools and hospitals. Communications would have to be improved; railways and roads built, river transport extended, telegraphs laid out; and the expense of these would far exceed the potentialities of traditional forms of revenue. That Siamese minds seem only to have been penetrated slowly by a full realization of what practical problems could present themselves, was perhaps an advantage for their confidence, but that Siamese culture was threatened was clear from the start, had indeed been for centuries.⁹⁹⁾

Fortunately also, the Siamese enjoyed more than most South East Asian peoples a tradition of political elasticity and adaptability. This cannot be attributed simply

98) J. C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand since 1850*. 1955. Chapters III, V-VI.

99) i.e. since at least the attempted French intervention of the 1680's; the Phaulkon era.

to their patrimonial system of government, as Jacobs seems to do,¹⁰⁰ for in this respect they differ markedly from most of their immediate neighbours who also enjoyed patrimonial regimes up to the nineteenth century. One special feature of significance would appear to be the ease with which successive younger, and more adaptable generations were able to succeed to power, such that the term 'Young Siam' crops up at regular twenty to thirty year intervals during the nineteenth century. Moreover, that Siam found herself, in the early and middle years of the century, unusually strong militarily, and extensive territorially in relation to most of her history, with the dynasty at perhaps its cyclical *apogée*, can only have been of benefit in maintaining its authority and prestige. And above all, probably, there was the role of Si Suriyawong, an exceptionally tough and experienced politician, who had evidently weighed up the 'pros and cons' between 1851 and 1855, concluded that compromise with the West was the less dangerous course for Siam, and who never seems to have wavered from this view subsequently. One would not attribute great far-sightedness to him, necessarily. His policy throughout might be characterized as one of simply 'playing things by ear', rather than planning for radical change. This was hardly surprising for, by the end of the 1850's, his family, the Bunnags, had established probably as complex, widespread and dominating a system of marriage and patronage links as had ever existed in Siam. Any administrative reorganization could destroy this base of power.

King Mongkut was altogether a different case. A seemingly familiar figure, yet he was clearly deeply affected by the earlier (1824) rejection of his first candidacy for the throne, and his long subsequent period in the political wilderness. His lack of confidence showed in his jealousy of his more experienced younger brother, Itsaret,¹⁰¹ his concern over even the most trivial aspects of the reception of his Mission to London in 1857,¹⁰² his tendency to refer to Siam as a 'half-civilized' country or 'small power',¹⁰³ and yet his seizing of every opportunity to parade his knowledge of the outside world before Western visitors.¹⁰⁴ The bitterness he had felt, at times amounting perhaps to a persecution complex *vis-a-vis* Rama III, the elder half-brother who had displaced him, might have turned him against the whole Siamese system. But his wilderness years had been spent in the Buddhist monkhood, one of the cornerstones of Siamese society and culture. There he had been able to be mildly innovative, with his founding of the reformist Thammayut order, but by

100) Jacobs, *op. cit.*, 314, 320.

101) A. L. Moffat, *Mongkut, in the King of Siam*. 1961. 57-8, 136. According to Somthat Thewet (*Chao Fa Chuthamani*. Bangkok, 1970. 162), the *Phrakhlang* suggested Itsaret's appointment as *Uparat* to Mongkut before the latter's accession; perhaps another Bunnag playing-off plan.

102) Moffat, *op. cit.*, 56.

103) *Ibid.*, 89, 108.

104) *Ibid.*, 85, and A. Bastian, *Reisen in Siam im Jahre 1863*. Jena, 1867, 73.

virtue of his theological success rather than the Western learning he was simultaneously indulging in. Thus, he features during his reign as one of the classic schizophrenic sufferers from the East-West impact, deeply interested in the West, and yet a stout defender of Thai Buddhist culture, and lacking confidence in his ability to preserve it. Within a year or two of the Bowring Treaty, he was envying Vietnam's continued isolation.¹⁰⁵⁾ And yet he was also devoted to reducing the power of the Bunnag family, and reasserting what he saw as the rightful authority of the throne, an ambition which demanded either exceptional political finesse in terms of the existing system, or action outside it.

In fact, Mongkut's reign sees limited developments in terms of all his main hopes and fears; Western influences as we have seen, the role of reformist Buddhism, the assertion of royal authority, and thereby an increase in the King's personal confidence. During the 1860's, with a temporary reduction in Si Suriyawong's influence, Mongkut attempted, albeit not very successfully, to play off France against Britain,¹⁰⁶⁾ and by 1867, with the diminution of French pressure, he was showing rather less concern for maintaining British friendship.¹⁰⁷⁾ Yet it would be unfair to have expected a great deal of innovation from this fascinating, but highly confused ruler. His untimely death in 1868 merely restored the dominance of Si Suriyawong, now as Regent during the first five years of the reign of Mongkut's minor son, Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), and the conservative policies he advocated.

Thus, in terms of the local political situation, the emergence of Chiangmai in the 1870's as the focal point of an active Siamese administrative policy was sudden, and perhaps surprising. Again, too, it has to be explained principally in terms of foreign pressure, already referred to above.¹⁰⁸⁾ Indeed, the British Burmese authorities had long been rather concerned about the lawless state of their border with Western Laos, but the squabble with the Foreign Office as to which should appoint the long-desired Consul or Agent to Chiangmai had blocked any action.¹⁰⁹⁾ Only with the decline in

105) C. M. Wilson, *State and Society in the Reign of Mongkut, 1851-68*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Cornell, 1970. 392.

106) In particular, he attempted to obtain French recognition of his son, Chulalongkorn, as heir-apparent, an effort only half-blocked by Si Suriyawong in alliance with Consul Knox. cf. Knox to Lord Stanley, 29th September, 10th November 1866. F. O. (Foreign Office Archives) 69/40, and Akin, *op. cit.*, 149.

107) Moffat, *op. cit.*, 121-4.

108) *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Kyoto University, 1973. 320. Prince Wongsathirat Sanit, halfbrother to King Mongkut, and supervisor of the *Mahatthai* in the 1850's and early 1860's, had led Siamese armies in vain invasions of the Burmese Shan State of Kengtung in 1852-3, and 1853-4 in an attempt to anticipate feared British expansion in that direction. Western Lao uncooperativeness, almost amounting to sabotage, had provoked him into advocating greater Siamese interference even that early. cf. letter to Mongkut, 14th June 1853, in Prince Damrong ed., *Chotmaihet Ruang Thap Chiengtung* (Account of the Chiengtung Wars). Bangkok, 1916. 113-114. But there was no apparent response from the rest of the Siamese Government at that time.

109) Hopkinson, Commissioner for Tenasserim, was first to propose such a post in a letter to the Indian Government, 9th November 1860. IFP, Vol. 60.

the formerly very prosperous Salween teak trade had Rangoon, in 1871, gone to the lengths of despatching an officer, Captain Lowndes, to investigate the situation. It was two aspects of his report, one general and the other more specific, that really focussed attention on the area.¹¹⁰⁾

In the first place, Lowndes brought into question once again the origin of authority in Chiangmai. He arrived in the town only shortly after the death of the old Prince, Kawilorot. While the old man had emphasized his independence of Bangkok at every opportunity, he had left the ruling family badly split, between those who had formed his own coterie, and those he had excluded from government. Unable to resolve the succession amongst themselves for lack of any clear leader, they awaited Bangkok's opinion. This was a temporary situation, and most of Chiangmai's traditional autonomy was to be restored on the investiture as Prince, of Inthanon, Kawilorot's son-in-law, in 1873. Lowndes, however, concluded that Siamese authority far exceeded what had hitherto been thought, and thereby over-emphasized the advantages to be derived from working through Bangkok to gain satisfaction.

Secondly, Lowndes publicized the unusually bloody outcome of a punitive expedition mounted by some of Kawilorot's subordinates shortly before his death. The sufferers were the mainly British Burmese lumbermen inhabitants of the border village of Mekaton, who were massacred along with their wives and children for having supposedly harboured dacoits. Besides being, in itself, a highly unsavoury example of the operation of Lao justice, it gave the British Burmese authorities a particularly good opportunity to intervene and demand reparations on behalf of various Moulmein commercial interests that had been financing the operations of the murdered men. The result was the trial of a long series of lawsuits in the Bangkok British Consular Court, many dating back long before 1870, awards of hefty damages against many of the Lao *Chao*, and then the refusal of *Chaophraya* Si Suriyawong to assert Siamese suzerainty by enforcing their implementation. Relations between him and Consul Knox thus broke down in early 1873, and impasse was reached.¹¹¹⁾

It was above all from the solution to this impasse that a new Siamese administrative policy stemmed. Clearly what was initially required was an adjustment of the internal power balance within Siam. Si Suriyawong's policies, indeed the man himself, had served their purpose. Generally pro-British in inclination, this was his first major *contretemps* with Britain, and his later brief return to power was merely to emphasize his outmodedness. A more flexible leadership was now required, with new ideas as to how peaceful external relations might be maintained, and Siamese society preserved.

110) Lowndes' Journal in F. O. 69/55.

111) F. O. 69/60.

However, the alternative source of authority that presented itself hardly seemed to meet these requirements, at least in terms of its activities in the 1870's. In contemporary terms, it evidently seemed rather like a revolutionary force dedicated to slavish emulation of the West. It took the form of a new 'Young Siam' group, and being led by the young king, Chulalongkorn, involved the extra complication of his inheritance of Mongkut's main ambition, the assertion of royal authority at the expense of overmighty subjects. Also, while Mongkut had sought out Western knowledge before his succession, his son had been brought up with it, even under the guidance of an English governess for a time. Certainly, Mongkut had ensured a parallel Siamese side to Chulalongkorn's education, but the latter's visits to Singapore, Batavia, British Burma and India in 1871-2 seem to have left him, at this stage, heavily enamoured of the Western way of doing things, and the Chiangmai issue gave him the opportunity to seize the initiative.

In mid-1873, Chulalongkorn by-passed the stalemated Si Suriyawong and Consul Knox by opening up a direct line of negotiation with the British Burmese authorities over the lawsuit awards. This was established first through one of the Tak officials, and then by means of a full-scale diplomatic mission to Rangoon and Calcutta, led by one of the King's confidants. In addition to the awards money being handed over, the initiative culminated in a Treaty being signed by the Siamese envoys with the Indian Government in recognition of the latter's prime interest in the Chiangmai area, and which provided for reciprocal policing arrangements and judicial cooperation on the Chiangmai-British Burma border. The judicial cooperation involved even restricting the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the Bangkok British Consulate to Siam Proper and the eastern and southern dependencies, and thereby presented the curious spectacle of the Siamese ostensibly denying the oneness of Siam with its Northern dependencies that the jurisdiction had hitherto implied. On the other hand, the Treaty provided for the appointment of a Siamese Judge-Commissioner to Chiangmai to hold court in conjunction with a periodically visiting British Indian civil officer on cases involving British subjects. It was this Judge-Commissioner, both office and the first individual to occupy it, that was to spearhead the new Siamese policy towards this principal of Siam's dependencies.¹¹²⁾

Various questions at once arise as to the character and purpose of this post. How far was it unique in Siamese administrative history? Who had personally planned it, what were to be its powers, and why had it gained sufficiently general acceptance to be actually instituted? And why was its first occupant chosen?

In the first place, while the appointment was undoubtedly unprecedented in

112) C. U. Aitchison ed., *Collection of Treaties, Engagements & Sanads* (1909) II, 419-425, and Knox to Aitchison, 19th September 1873, and to Lord Granville, 7th March 1874. F. O. 69/56, 58.

Western Laos, to which only temporary *ad hoc* royal commissioners (*Kha luang*) had been sent in the past, other authors have posited various appointments to other parts of Siam's periphery as precedents. Tej Bunnag has mentioned the appointment to Thalang (Phuket) at the beginning of the nineteenth century during the Burmese Wars, and also that of a member of the leading Singhaseni family to Khorat in 1827, at the time of the Vientiane revolt.¹¹³⁾ Neither place, however, possessed *prathetserat* status, and neither appointment survived. Miss Wilson's Fourth Reign examples¹¹⁴⁾ of Commissioners sent to Cambodia in face of the French intervention there seem more appropriate, but they too terminated, of course, with the French take-over. There may also have been an appointment to Luang Phrabang in the 1850's,¹¹⁵⁾ which, like the rest, proved merely transitory. But finally, as Tej Bunnag notes,¹¹⁶⁾ a *Kha Luang Pracham Huamuang*, or Permanent Royal Commissioner, was appointed to Phuket in 1875, simultaneously with the Chiangmai appointment. That to Phuket was designed to supervise the developing tin-mining industry of the Malay dependencies and southern Siam, and prevent it becoming, like the teak trade, a contentious issue in Anglo-Siamese relations. Its purpose was thus perhaps not so different from the Chiangmai appointment, but its importance must be judged by the fact that while it was 'permanent' and responsible for dependencies, it was based on Phuket Island in Siam Proper; that it was Phuket itself, largely Chinese-settled and the chief mining centre, that was the chief source of the problem; and that the first occupant was a member of the Bunnag family which had important links with some of the Chinese communities in Siam and, as mentioned above,¹¹⁷⁾ dominated the peninsula politically. It would have been a surprise indeed, to have seen any major administrative innovations emanating from this appointment. Chiangmai, on the other hand, on the basis of past history, stood out as the probable greatest obstacle to any policy of administrative centralization, and the place where success could set an effective example for the rest of Siam's periphery.

While King Chulalongkorn undoubtedly played his part in the Phuket appointment, he and his supporters were clearly principally responsible for that to Chiangmai. Si Suriyawong had demonstrated quite openly his opposition to any interference with Chiangmai's autonomy; indeed it was subsequently believed amongst British diplomatic circles that he was no great believer in the maintenance of Siamese suzerainty in

113) Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892-1915*. Unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1968. 101.

114) Wilson, *op. cit.*, 520.

115) A *Phraya* Rat (Rachasena?) was sent "to restore and preserve peace in that quarter" in 1854. cf. *Abstract of the Journal of Rev. Dan Beach Bradley* (1936), 21st December.

116) Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 101.

117) *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Kyoto University. 1973. 317.

Western Laos as it already existed.¹¹⁸⁾ To the young King, on the other hand, such rights formed part of his royal birthright. It is in him, personally, above all, that one sees the developing neurosis about British imperial ambitions during this period, perhaps inherited from his father's last years, and stimulated by Si Suriyawong's unconcern. And as British commercial interests in Lower Burma began to develop links with Western Laos, and to demand railway and telegraph concessions in the area for lines to terminate at Moulmein rather than Bangkok,¹¹⁹⁾ there was much for Chulalongkorn's fears to feed upon. This was a time too, when he and his Western-influenced supporters were becoming really aware of the need to conserve the country's major natural resources, such as the teak of Western Laos. Thus, by a decree of 1874, all agreements involving the exploitation of such natural resources were henceforth to be publicly registered in Bangkok, in the case of the dependencies, via the Commissioners at Phuket and Chiangmai.¹²⁰⁾

This, then, formed with the judicial and the policing, the three main, and quite unprecedented responsibilities of the Chiangmai Judge-Commissioner and his subordinates. But the men who first filled the posts, in particular, the *Kha Luang Tralakan* himself, *Phra* Narin Rachaseni (Phum Sichaiyan), who was subsequently to rise to one of the highest offices in the kingdom, were members of Chulalongkorn's own private circle. Throughout the six years of this, his first period of service at Chiangmai, *Phra* Narin (or *Phraya* Thep Prachun as he became) was in regular personal correspondence with the King,¹²¹⁾ and as a founder-member of the Privy Council, was identified with other even more significant royal administrative initiatives during 1874. Almost certainly, so far as Chiangmai was concerned, he was seen by the 'Young Siam' party as 'the thin end of the wedge', gradually to expand Siamese influence into authority, perhaps ultimately by force. But the Siamese version of his title did not include the term *pracham*, or 'permanent'. In 1874, the conservative opposition to such ambitions, even within the Siamese Court, was far too strong for the appointment to be posed as anything other than a temporary

118) According to a later British Minister, it was the "Old Regent [Si Suriyawong's] policy of extending in the direction of the Malay Peninsula, and giving up the Laos". Satow Diaries, 29th November 1885. P. R. O. (British Public Record Office Archives) 30/33/15/10.

119) Annual trade between Moulmein and Western Laos was already worth £ 600,000 before 1860, mostly in teak, while the annual teak trade of all Northern Thailand with Bangkok never exceeded £ 25,000 in the 1860's. (Hopkinson to Secretary Beadon, 9th November 1860. IFP Vol. 60., and British Consulate Trade Reports) Yet only odd British merchants paid brief visits to Western Laos after the mid-1860's, and the Burma-China link railway and telegraph schemes were concentrated rather on the Salween valley until the advent of A. R. Colquhoun, one of the assistants to Colonel Street on his mission to Chiangmai in 1879.

120) *Prachum Kotmai Prachamsok* (Collection of Thai Statutes). Bangkok, 1935, VIII. 230-4.

121) Much of this is printed in Natawut Sutthisongkhram's *Somdet Chaophraya Borommaha Si Suriyawong Mahaburut*. Bangkok, 1962. Vol. II, and 27 *Chaophraya*. Bangkok, 1967. 633-851.

expedient, notwithstanding the Treaty.

And this was the condition in which it was to remain for some years, owing to the deterioration in Chulalongkorn's situation in Bangkok. Overeagerness, and perhaps growing overconfidence, had led the King and his party to attempt to institutionalize too quickly the political advantage they had gained in 1873 over Si Suriyawong and the conservatives. Measures to restore royal control over revenue collection, however objectionable, were understandable to all, but these were followed by pure importations from the West, like the Cabinet-style Council of State and Privy Council (both bearing the actual English name, and largely packed with royal supporters), a new Supreme Court, and a Committee on slavery reform dedicated to the ultimate abolition of an institution at the base of Thai society and the elite's domination of it.¹²²⁾ When it also became apparent that many of those surrounding the King were inarticulate men of straw,¹²³⁾ a reaction set in. An apparent quarrel between Chulalongkorn and his Second King at the end of 1874, known as the 'Front Palace Incident', was exploited by a group of senior officials and Princes headed by the *Phrakhlang*, *Chaophraya* Phanuwong (Thuam Bunnag), not to bring back Si Suriyawong, but simply to force the King to put his governmental innovations back into cold storage.¹²⁴⁾ This was, in some ways, a more dispiriting situation for Chulalongkorn to find himself in than the earlier Regency, when just one man alone, Si Suriyawong, had seemed the obstacle to his desires and ambitions. Early 1875 revealed the full strength and opposition of the Siamese elite as a whole.

Nevertheless, Chulalongkorn was as yet too young a man to abandon his dreams. As observers pointed out at the time, the older generation would eventually pass on,¹²⁵⁾ and careful, limited moves might be made in the meanwhile. Chiangmai, indeed, saw some of them. The judicial cooperation provisions of the 1874 Treaty had soon broken down irretrievably, and in 1876, the Commissionership there was about to be withdrawn when a serious dacoit robbery of a British Burmese on the borders of the state prompted British demands for its investigation. Further teak industry lawsuits followed, and revived British interest in the appointment of a Vice-Consul to the town. *Phraya* Thep therefore stayed on until 1880, and by gradually weaving himself into the local power structure and exploiting local rivalries between

122) Prachoom Chomchai, *Chulalongkorn the Great*. Tokyo, 1965. esp. 28-36, and Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 89-90.

123) Salau Lekharuchi and Udom Pramuanwithaya, *Phra Piya Maharaj*. Bangkok, 1961. 137-8.

124) Natawut, *Somdet Chaophraya*. 799, 844; Vice-Consul Newman to Lord Derby, 4th March 1875. F. O. 69/62; Editorial in *Siam Weekly Advertiser*, 9th March 1876. The 'Front Palace' was the official residence of the *Uparat*.

125) For example, U. S. Consul D. B. Sickels, quoted in Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*. 83. The King himself later suggested that he had seen the situation thus. cf. reply to 1885 petition in Chai-Anan Samudavanisa, *Phenphatanakan Muang chabap rek khong Thai* (National Improvement Plans: first steps of the Thai). Bangkok, 1970. 91.

Prince Inthanon's brother, *Uparat* Bunthawong, and wife, *Chao* Thiphakeson, the Commissioner was able ultimately to arrange the institution of a border police under the command of a sympathetic Lao *Chao*.¹²⁶⁾ The following decade does appear to have been freer of dacoity in the teak forest areas, though probably as much for other reasons.

The Commissioner's attempts to supervise the teak industry itself, and siphon off much of its revenue for Bangkok appear to have been rather less successful, but he was able to support himself and his retinue out of other sources of local revenue, such as the tax-farms then being introduced.¹²⁷⁾ He even organized the resettlement of areas bordering on the Shan States against general opposition on the part of local leaders,¹²⁸⁾ and enforced a royal Edict of Toleration in support of the American Presbyterian Mission, whose local success would appear to have been both a reflection of, and a contribution to the developing breakdown in local lines of authority and ties of loyalty.¹²⁹⁾ In 1878, *Phraya* Thep received the title of *Phu Samret Rachakan*, 'Regent', or 'Acting Governor', with personal powers of life and death.¹³⁰⁾ Despite the continuing opposition of *Uparat* Bunthawong and the Prince of Lampang, he had almost got the local hierarchy at his beck and call, when the Indian Government at last announced its intention of sending to Chiangmai a mission under a Colonel Street to investigate the failure of the judicial cooperation provisions of the 1874 Treaty. Moreover, it was first to visit Bangkok to consult with the British Consul and the Siamese Government, and there it was to provoke another reactionary shift in the power balance.¹³¹⁾

What the Street Mission amounted to at the time, so far as the Siamese elite in general was concerned, was a public demonstration of the failure of the King's Chiangmai policy. Now, with hindsight, it is evident that *Phraya* Thep had been given a very difficult task to perform, and in extending Siamese influence to the degree that he had without arousing militant local opposition, had achieved a good measure of success. But the British, or British Indian demand was for order and Western-style justice to protect their trade. The latter, at any rate, *Phraya* Thep had not achieved; British pressure had been resumed, and Chulalongkorn's renewed interference in this major dependency seemed to have served no useful purpose save

126) *Phraya* Thep to Siamese Government, 10th September 1877, translated in F. O. 69/68.

127) Memo on Taxes and Monopolies by Vice-Consul Gould, 9th April 1885. F. O. 628/157. These were accompanied by the employment of Chinese tax-farmers from Bangkok, one factor opposing the growing Bangkok-Moulmein economic links.

128) D. McGilvary, *A Half-Century among the Siamese and Lao*. 1912. 210. Natawut, *Somdet Chaophraya*. 1269-86.

129) McGilvary, *op. cit.*, Chapter IX, and to Sickels, 17th October 1879. DUSCB (Despatches of U.S. Consuls, Bangkok) VI.

130) McGilvary, *op. cit.*, 178.

131) India Office to F. O., 4th October 1878. F. O. 69/94

possibly his own. When, in early 1879, in the discussions with Street and Consul Knox, the King's negotiators were induced to agree to a joint Anglo-Siamese Commission to investigate the situation in Chiengmai on the spot, to the eventual appointment of a British police officer to train a local force, and learnt that a British Vice-Consul would still be appointed to Chiengmai in due course,¹³²⁾ Chulalongkorn's prestige sank swiftly. It could be said that Siam's role in Chiengmai was saved by the subsequent *Phra Pricha* affair,¹³³⁾ for it preoccupied British attention for at least a year, and ruled out any quick follow-up to the Street Mission. Yet the arraigning, conviction, and execution of this same *Phra Pricha* (Sam-ang Amatyakul), son of one of the King's principal supporters, for having unauthorisedly, and thus treasonably married himself to Consul Knox's daughter, brought down his whole family, and reduced Chulalongkorn's authority to a new low. The British Government was forced to replace Knox, and the Bunnags, *Chaophraya* Phanuwong and Si Suriyawong, were once again dominant, and policies of administrative reorganization blocked.

In fact, however, the mid-1879 to mid-1880 twelvemonth was to prove the last, shortlived period of control by the old guard. They were now indeed aging; Si Suriyawong in particular was already very infirm, and to die in 1883. *Chao Fa* Maha Mala, the King's uncle, and the *Uparat* followed by 1886, Si Suriyawong's son, Surawong, who had succeeded him at the *Kalahom*, and finally Phanuwong in 1888. From 1880 onwards, the King was able slowly to regain control, though by methods perhaps even more cautious than those he had employed in the late 1870's, and in particular through the employment of his now maturing full and half-brothers as opposed to members of the official families. The development of a military force, the Royal Pages Regiment, loyal personally to the King, was evidently an important step, possibly discouraging a further Bunnag coup as early as November 1880.¹³⁴⁾

But in the long run, in terms of general elite attitudes, the foreign relations field remained the critical one. In mid-1880, *Chaophraya* Phanuwong had arrived in London to attempt a renegotiation of the 1855 (Bowring) and 1874 (Chiengmai) treaties, on lines already agreed in Bangkok. Instead, he reduced the discussions he had to a farce, in the eyes of the Foreign Office, by attempting vainly to obtain an increase in Siam's export duties, the collection of which he personally monopolized.¹³⁵⁾ Besides discrediting himself, Phanuwong thus threw away Siam's last chance of persuading the British Government to abandon its plan for the suspect Chiengmai

132) Knox to Lord Salisbury, 4th February 1879. F. O. 69/70.

133) Knox to same, 6th, 22nd, 29th April, 3rd, 14th May. F. O. 69/70. Natawut, *Somdet Chaophraya*. 969-1027, 1045-1169, 27 *Chaophraya*, 735-749. NA (Siamese National Archives) Nangsu Chut (Phiset) Vol. 1 (C. S. 1240-1).

134) Consul-General Palgrave to Lord Granville, 1st December 1880. F. O. 69/74.

135) Palgrave to same, 12th April, 27th August 1880. F. O. 69/73, 74.

Vice-Consulate. And although *Phraya* Thep had at last been recalled to Bangkok earlier in the year, the Siamese were now virtually back in the situation of 1873, of needing a positive Chiangmai policy for fear of the whole of Western Laos just gradually slipping away under British influence.

It is against this background, therefore, that the Chiangmai question makes another, and perhaps its greatest contribution to the development of a Siamese administrative centralization policy. It was not until 1883 that a new Anglo-Siamese Chiangmai Treaty was signed, superseding that of 1874, and specifically providing for the establishment of a Vice-Consulate. Nor was it until mid-1884 that the first Vice-Consul, E. B. Gould, actually arrived. Judging by the character of the two Siamese Judge-Commissioners who succeeded *Phraya* Thep in turn, and the lack of backing given them by Bangkok, the Siamese Government continued to hope against hope through the intervening years for a maintenance of the *status quo*. But the ratification of the treaty made the appointment a certainty, and promised a relative flood of fortune-hunters and commercial interests into the region, both British Asian and British, and even railway promoters, confident in the security of the Vice-Consul's protection. In Bangkok, by late 1883, the King was virtually in full control. In Chiangmai, *Uparat* Bunthawong was dead, and *Chao* Thiphakeson dying. The excuse, even the need for Siamese intervention was there and surely obvious to all, but did the King still want it?

This is an apposite question both in terms of the man, and the events that were to follow. That he is less well-known as a character than his father reflects probably a more colourless personality, and the impression conveyed by most contemporary Western sources, as opposed to more recent accounts, is that Chulalongkorn was now becoming much more of a typical oriental potentate. Certainly he was handsome in Siamese eyes, though by now putting on weight, had developed a considerable presence, and seems to have had no really vicious streak in him. But the demands of the Inner Palace must have become considerable—more than half his eventual seventy-seven children had been born by the end of 1883, and by twenty-four different wives—and on top of this, his health was never good—he almost died for the second time in mid-1883.¹³⁶⁾ Claims that he would become wearied and languid before he had fully carried out a reform¹³⁷⁾ are simply what one would expect, and, in time, that reforms themselves would seem less attractive, however real had been his commitment to them back in the 1870's. His growing concern for Siamese cultural traditions, the attitudes of the older generation, and the proprieties of his station would appear evidenced by the fate of his elder sister, Princess Ying Yaowalak, a few

136) Vice-Consul Newman to Lord Granville, 15th September 1883. F. O. 628/136. The first occasion had been shortly before his accession, of malaria, contracted at the same time as his father.

137) H. Hallett, *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant*. 1890. 454-5.

years later. Left with little prospect of marriage, she was foolish enough to become pregnant by a slave attached to Wat Phra Keo, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, in effect, the royal chapel. Reportedly, both her lover and a woman intermediary were summarily executed, she herself was deprived of the child, and was dead within months, and all this despite Chulalongkorn's assertion that his sisters could marry if they liked, and his declared aim of abolishing slavery.¹³⁸⁾

So far as the more specifically relevant events are concerned, a new Chiangmai initiative was indeed launched in 1884. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that if its spearhead, the King's second oldest half-brother, Prince Phichit, had not been sent to Chiangmai, he would have led a similar mission to the north-east.¹³⁹⁾ Employing his Bangkok Supreme Court experience, and possibly, as Tej Bunnag suggests,¹⁴⁰⁾ knowledge of British and Dutch administrative methods in Malaya and the East Indies, he had already been at work drawing up plans to cover the dissemination of government intentions and supervision of the people, militia matters, government appointments, revenue and frontier customs, dacoity suppression, and the establishment of an 'International Court' at Chiangmai. What the King thought of these plans, and how far he gave Phichit permission to put them into practice in Western Laos, we do not know. The choice of Phichit indicated perhaps how the enthusiasms of the next 'Young Siam' group had already been unleashed in the course of the struggle to displace the Bunnags. But Chulalongkorn's dominant concern, undoubtedly, was to ensure adequately easy relations between the British Vice-Consul and the Lao *Chao*, but to prevent them becoming too intimate. In his Birthday Speech of 21st September 1884, he made no mention of any desire for administrative centralization, and described Phichit's mission as merely "to establish the proper system of the International Court there, and to organize the desirable reforms for the benefit of those States, and for the promotion of peace and commerce....."¹⁴¹⁾

What then was the outcome of Phichit's mission, which was quite as unprecedented in its own way as *Phraya* Thep's a decade earlier? Indeed, the employment of a member of the royal family in a lengthy political role outside the capital, except in time of war, had invariably been scrupulously avoided by Siamese kings, unless one goes all the way back to the heir-apparent-Viceroy stationed at Phitsanulok under fourteenth and fifteenth century Ayuthya. In the nineteenth century, Phichit was only the second 'royal' to visit Western Laos.¹⁴²⁾

Far from Phichit attempting to give a new lead to local separatist elements, however, one is reduced almost at once to trying to explain why, in the immediate

138) Satow Diaries, 20-22nd February 1887. P. R. O. 30/33/15/10.

139) Phichit to King, 19th November 1883. NA. N. C. (P) Vol. 25, No. 18.

140) Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 107.

141) 21st September 1884. Translation in F. O. 69/90.

142) The first having been Prince Wongsathirat Sanit, cf. fn. 108 *supra*.

sense, even in terms of the Prince's sincere centralizing motives, his mission gave birth to 'a pup'. Indeed, before he was withdrawn under something of a cloud, it seems probable that even the King had envisaged for him a rather longer stay at Chiangmai than a mere year. But the conflict of purpose was evident from the start. Inhibited, thus, by the King's caution, Phichit, on arrival at Chiangmai, made no real attempt to disabuse the Lao *Chao* of their impression that the British Vice-Consulate was to be only a temporary appointment (and therefore, implicitly, his own post too). Yet on the face of it, the only basis on which this could have become true was the effective administrative absorption of the Lao states within Siam Proper, and in apparent recognition of this reality, Phichit soon began to launch himself with considerable enthusiasm against the bastions of local Lao particularism.

Together, Phichit's plans had made a quite comprehensive whole, but efforts towards militia deployment, dacoity suppression, revenue control and supervision of the people, depended within the Thai social system upon seizing and legitimizing a right to charismatic authority and powers of appointment of a quite un-Western type. Phichit might talk of disseminating Bangkok's intentions, whatever they were, but there was little enough chance of him, a Siamese, rousing the Lao peasantry against the local elite, and far too many dangers in such a course. The practical answer was the application of a mixture of pressure and encouragement to the *Chao* themselves to achieve a transfer of authority, and the lynch-pin of the Prince's initiative was, therefore, his plan for the reorganization of the vague framework of local government into a system of *Khao Sanam Luang leh Sena Hok Tamneng*, the 'State Council and Six Ministers'.¹⁴³⁾ Ostensibly, simply a scheme to strengthen the role of the six senior *Chao* in each state *vis-a-vis* the traditional State Councils, and to give them distinct functional responsibilities: justice, war, finance, agriculture, interior, and household, the hope was that each respective Minister-*Chao* would in time become increasingly responsible to the corresponding Minister in Bangkok. Undoubtedly the scheme was rather ambitious for the little states of Western Laos when one remembers that functional apportionment of governmental responsibilities had always been honoured more in theory than in practice even in Bangkok. But it also required resolute pursuance by Bangkok to achieve its purpose. The choice of the Ministers-*Chao* was henceforth to reside with the particular State Prince, in consultation with the local Siamese Commissioner rather than the State Council (*Khao Sanam Luang*) as of old. In Chiangmai at least, after Phichit's departure, lack of Bangkok support for its local officials meant that the system simply contributed to the pre-eminence of *Phrachao* Inthanon.

143) N.A. file M. 71. Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 106-8, terms it "the royal government and the six ministers". The six posts were modelled on the Bangkok *Senabodi*, but *Khao Sanam Luang* was the traditional title of the respective Lao state councils.

With this encouragement, it was also Inthanon who proved the principal obstacle to most of Prince Phichit's other plans. Greater Siamese control over local sources of revenue must have seemed doubly advantageous to Phichit, both to finance the local Siamese presence, and to undermine one of the chief foundations of the local hierarchy's power. But Bangkok too was interested in increasing its revenue from the periphery. However, when Phichit proposed siphoning off a greater proportion of the royalty on teak-cutting, euphemistically in favour of Chulalongkorn's six-year old eldest son, Wachirunhit, Inthanon's reaction was to offer as an alternative all sorts of vague political concessions on condition that he be allowed to impose a new personal levy on the industry himself.¹⁴⁴⁾ Ultimately Phichit obtained a paper agreement from the old *Phrachao* to his scheme, but the increased Bangkok share of the royalty simply encouraged the connivance of the local Lao officialdom in the non-registration of cut timber. And this tendency was further promoted by the Prince's attempt to introduce a new forest-lease system in Western Laos. Devised for Siam Proper in early 1884, it required the immediate re-ratification of all old long leases, and limited their duration, like any new ones, to a maximum of three years. In addition to again giving the Siamese a greater say in local affairs, the then British Minister believed that the ulterior aim was to drive out of business the generally small-time British Burmese foresters, who would not be able to recoup their investment in such a short period.¹⁴⁵⁾ But again, the forest-owning *Chao* simply discouraged their lessees from even presenting themselves at the Commissioner's office in Chiangmai. Even the other financial decrees that Phichit induced Inthanon to issue, including most importantly, the substitution of a monetary riceland tax based on acreage as in Siam Proper for the traditional proportional tax in kind, initially benefited the old *Phrachao*, as collector, rather than the Siamese.¹⁴⁶⁾

None of these schemes achieved much success, therefore, initially at least. And yet they had offered considerable potential benefits to Bangkok, so that, whatever the doubts of the King and other members of the elite about Phichit's plans beforehand, some effective expression of support, moral or otherwise, might have been expected for their application. That it was not must be attributed largely to Phichit's embarrassing activities in the 'foreign relations' field, which, I have suggested, King Chulalongkorn regarded as by far the most important.

For one thing, Phichit attempted to resume, and even extend *Phraya* Thep's expansionist border policy. By 1884, the disintegrating regime of Thibaw, last king of Burma, had provoked into rebellion most of the Shan States, although it was still sufficiently threatening for some of the latter to desire an alternative suzerain. The

144) Phichit to King, 20th July 1884. NA M71/13.

145) Satow to Granville, 16th May 1884, 19th June 1885. F.O. 69/89, 101.

146) Gould to Satow, 6th December 1884, 15th January 1885. F.O. 628/142, 157.

most easterly, Kengtung, reportedly made approaches to Siam, through Phichit, who was inclined to respond favourably. But the Lao *Chao* saw this as a threat to their frontier autonomy, warned off the Shans, and the opportunity was missed.¹⁴⁷⁾ Phichit's further activities, his making free with the local levies in an attempt to extend the effective frontier of Western Laos right up to the Salween river in the west and north-west at the expense of Kengtung and other Shan States, soon precluded any accommodation with them, and even this was eventually halted as a result of British diplomatic pressure in Bangkok.¹⁴⁸⁾

But the principal differences between Phichit and the local Lao hierarchy arose out of the workings of the new Chiangmai International Court and the role of the British Vice-Consul. Various contentious lawsuits between British subjects and the Lao Princes, some new, and some, as usual, of quite ancient vintage, kept Phichit in a state of perpetual anxiety throughout his term of office, and made it almost impossible for him to keep on good terms with both Vice-Consul Gould and the locals. While, in the early stages, he may have been prepared rather to sacrifice the Lao, in Gould's eyes the situation became quite the reverse following the outcome of the most critical of all the cases, in September-October 1884.

This arose out of the attempt of one of Inthanon's relatives to repossess the Lao, freed slave wife of a Burmese British subject. Gould protested to Phichit on her behalf, and thereby extended to Chiangmai the issue of slavery which had long been so highly controversial in Siam Proper.¹⁴⁹⁾ Indeed, gaining no immediate satisfaction via the perplexed Prince, Gould decided to risk a *cause célèbre* by bearding the lion in his own den, and broke into Inthanon's palace garden where the old man was gambling with his wives. Soldiers rushed up as he grasped at the old man's arm, and, according to Inthanon, bloodshed was only narrowly averted by his own *sang-froid*.¹⁵⁰⁾ Gould ultimately gained his specific object; the freeing of the woman, Imung, and another blow was thereby delivered against the institution of slavery in the country. But Inthanon protested to Bangkok both of Gould's behaviour, and, seemingly, Phichit's general uncooperativeness. So far as Gould was concerned, the Siamese Government, through its Minister in London, seized the opportunity to attack once again the very existence of his post,¹⁵¹⁾ but the Foreign Office consented merely to administer a mild reprimand to its occupant. As for Phichit, however, the Imung case and resulting incident seem to have put a real blight on the rest of his Commissionership. It was around October-November 1884 that Bangkok began to put a

147) Satow to Granville, 28th May 1884 and enclosures. F. O. 69/89.

148) Vice-Consul French to Satow, 11th October 1884. P. R. O. 30/33/2/1.

149) Gould to Satow, 11th October 1884. F. O. 69/99.

150) Phrachao and Chiangmai Chao to Lukkhun Sala, 5th October 1884, in same.

151) Prince Naret to Granville, 26th January 1885. F. O. 69/102.

definite brake on most of his activities, and in early 1885, the King decided to order his return to the capital after June.¹⁵²⁾ The intervening months saw the breakdown of virtually all the Prince's onetime optimistic initiatives, although in one last cunning move, he arranged the future marriage of Inthanon's child daughter-heir, Princess Dara, with the King.¹⁵³⁾

The verdict on the mission as a whole must necessarily be a complex one, certainly not that of mere failure, without significance in either short or long term. So far as Chiangmai specifically was concerned, admittedly there was little enough positive outcome in the short term. Prince Phichit was replaced as Commissioner by a middle-ranking official, *Phraya* Montri Suriyawong (Chun Bunnag), a nephew of the late Si Suriyawong, but a mild and tactful man, whose principal desire was to retire to the comforts of Bangkok as soon as possible. His period of office, 1885-7, saw no further attempts to undermine the internal authority of the local Lao hierarchies, and almost his only noteworthy activity was to resume, briefly, Phichit's policy of securing the Salween as the frontier with the Shan States. Even this was undertaken on the encouragement of Ernest Satow, the British Minister in Bangkok,¹⁵⁴⁾ in the months before the British annexation of Upper Burma and the Shan States, proclaimed on the 1st January 1886. But it was also in these years that *Phrachao* Inthanon found himself really able to exploit the 'State Council and Six Ministers' scheme to his own considerable financial advantage, the result being increasing alienation on the part of the more junior Lao officials, particularly the local elites of the lesser towns in the state.¹⁵⁵⁾ Phichit's measures were having their impact therefore, notwithstanding his departure.

In the wider sense, however, there can be no doubt that the Prince's Chiangmai term of office stands out as a landmark in Siamese administrative development. Significantly, he did not find himself in permanent disgrace in Bangkok, and was indeed to continue to play for some years a leading role in Siamese administrative reorganization equal to that of any but the great Minister of the Interior, Prince Damrong himself. Of considerable interest, thus, are Phichit's privately expressed explanations for his withdrawal. To Gould, for instance, he implied that Bangkok still feared that Britain would manage to seduce away the allegiance of the Lao *Chao* if he was permitted to provoke them any further.¹⁵⁶⁾ To Satow, on his return to the capital,

152) Satow Diaries, 17th January 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/15/8.

153) Sangiem Khumphawat, *Rachapradiphat nai Somdet Phra Piya Maharat* 527. Dara was the *Phrachao's* only surviving child by *Mechao* Thiphakeson, and according to the prevailing matrilineal system of descent, her eventual husband would have the best claim to succeed as Prince of Chiangmai.

154) Satow Diaries, 9th July 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/15/9.

155) Acting Vice-Consul Archer to Chief Commr. Bernard, 20th May 1887. F. O. 628/171.

156) Gould to Satow, 17th May 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/2/5.

he claimed that the King personally had been misled by the various officials who had previously served at Chiangmai into taking an exaggerated view of the difficulties facing any Siamese interference.¹⁵⁷⁾ But if the King thought he could continue to treat Siam's dependencies as 'foreign relations' issues in this way, and simply retract the sort of initiatives Phichit had attempted, thereby also reasserting his own paramount authority and leadership, a new foreign pressure was at once to demonstrate how inextricably linked were the two questions of sovereignty and reform. Again, following Phichit, in conversation with Satow, April 1886:

.....He said they could not get the King to surrender any part of his authority: he is the legislature. Told him how Russia had been ruined in the Napoleonic wars by the system of so-called Cabinet Ministers, whereas there was no real cabinet, but only Ministers reporting to the King separately.

Bigit [Phichit] says that he is disappointed. The King does not show the same appetite for reform that he had expected. The death of the Regent and the Second King had removed all obstacle, and yet no progress is made. Devan [Prince Devawongse, *Phrakhlang* Minister] has done nothing towards abolition of forced service, which Bigit thinks very important, especially in the Eastern Laos states or provinces where 4 ticals a year has to be paid by the able-bodied men as a penalty for the rebellion of Wiengchan [Vientiane] 50 years ago. In face of France it is necessary to reform the condition of those provinces.¹⁵⁸⁾

These remarks referred to much that had occurred in the intervening months. It had been back in early 1885 that the staffs of the Siamese Legations in London and Paris, headed by Princes Naret and Prisdang, had petitioned the King for the introduction of a constitution and cabinet-based form of government.¹⁵⁹⁾ They had claimed that such innovations would strengthen the fabric of the country, but Chulalongkorn, perhaps influenced in part by the recent Chiangmai events, had replied that Siam was not yet ready for them for lack of qualified personnel to operate them, or any general mood for change. He had also emphasized his own personal role, dwelling at length on all the problems he had faced in asserting his authority through the first fifteen years of his reign, something he was now unwilling to put again at risk. Thus, in June 1885, he had confirmed the cautious Devawongse as his chief adviser, and with control over the *Phrakhlang*, the first of the territorial ministries to come under one of the King's brothers, but to Phichit's great frustration. Subsequent events must simply have confirmed Chulalongkorn in his attitude. During early 1886, the nefarious activities of Prince Phuttharet at the *Nakhonban*, the Bangkok 'Lord-Mayoralty',

157) Satow Diaries, 13th September 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/15/9.

158) *Ibid.*, 21st April 1886. P. R. O. 30/33/15/10.

159) Chai-Anan Samudavanisa, *Phenphatanakan* for both documents and analysis. cf. also Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, 261-3, for brief discussion, though misdated 1887.

came to light, and led to his dismissal.¹⁶⁰⁾ The chief sponsors of the 1885 petition rather disgraced themselves, Naret by getting into debt, and Prisdang, for writing 'impertinent letters' to the King, and both were recalled from Europe.¹⁶¹⁾ Finally, the older generation even built up enough courage to attempt a counter-attack against the forces of reform; in September 1886, *Chaophraya* Phanuwong and two hundred other officials were reported to have "refused to sign certain new regulations for the preservation of public order drawn up by the Commission for executing the Office of Mayor of Bangkok."¹⁶²⁾ Chulalongkorn, therefore, had justification enough in terms of the Bangkok political situation for sitting on his privilege.

Yet as Phichit also mentions in 1886, the new foreign threat, from France, was already reaching crisis proportions, and it was the eventual Siamese response to this that both highlighted the real significance of his Chiangmai mission, and gave him a new personal role to play. The French interest in Eastern Laos had begun to revive around 1882, as a by-product of a developing new intervention in Vietnam. Dr. Neis, a naval intelligence officer, set off that year on a lengthy mission of exploration up the Mekhong valley, and thence down the Chaophraya valley to Bangkok.¹⁶³⁾ Almost at once, the Siamese despatched new military *khaluang* to the Mekhong towns of Ubon and Champassak,¹⁶⁴⁾ and, as we have seen, Phichit had himself, at that time, expected to follow them. Positive French action, however, waited upon the securing of their position in Vietnam, and the termination of their war with China, not effected till the treaty of June 11, 1885. Chulalongkorn evidently relaxed, and when responding to the petitioners of early 1885, who had shown considerable concern about the security of Siam's periphery, he made no reference to the question, and so far as he conceived of change, talked entirely in terms of the reorganization of the central government "in a year or two's time".¹⁶⁵⁾ Both this omission and the general course of events around this time discussed above, suggest a lack of awareness on his part of the size of the potential threat from France, and certainly discount any possibility of a government plan behind what was now actually to occur in practice, the transfer of the focus of the Siamese 'forward movement' in the dependencies from Western to Eastern Laos.

The threat was real enough, however. Within weeks of the China treaty, while Phichit was still wending his way back from Chiangmai, the French Government simultaneously demanded of the Siamese the right to establish a Consulate at Luang

160) Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*. 112.

161) Satow Diaries, 28th March 1886. P. R. O. 30/33/15/10.

162) *Ibid.*, 1st October 1886.

163) Dr. P. Neis, "Voyage dans le Haut Laos," *Tour du Monde* 1885, Pt. 2, 1-80.

164) Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 103.

165) Chai-Anan, *op. cit.*, 92.

Phrabang, to protect non-existent French trade in the Mekhong valley,¹⁶⁶⁾ and presented to Britain a proposal for the division of Siam between them into respective spheres of influence.¹⁶⁷⁾ Admittedly, the Siamese stalled for nearly a year regarding the Consulate, but on obtaining in May 1886, a limited form of recognition of their suzerainty over Luang Phrabang from the French Minister at Bangkok, the Comte de Kergaradec, they conceded this establishment of a French presence.¹⁶⁸⁾ The British Government's response to the idea of spheres of influence was a counter-proposal for a mutual self-denying ordinance so far as intervention in Siam was concerned, but already one leading French politician, De Lanessan, was talking of "taking away all the Laos from Siam and leaving her only the valley of the Menam [Chaophraya]."¹⁶⁹⁾

Nevertheless, despite all this feverish diplomatic activity, the Siamese initiative in Eastern Laos, when it came, was prompted principally by local difficulties. The increased disorder in Tongking and along the China border following the French intervention there spread into the Mekhong valley in the form of new incursions by Muslim Chin Haw bands, and Siamese forces were sent up in 1885-6 to confront them. Although the command was needlessly divided between the able and ambitious *Phra* Naiwai (Choem Seng-Chuto), and Prince Prachak, in Satow's words, "an ass"; "*liberari meam animam*",¹⁷⁰⁾ the campaigns proved militarily successful. Siamese suzerainty, in the traditional sense, seemed everywhere accepted among the Eastern Lao principalities, and in early 1887 the Siamese withdrew, leaving behind only a minimal military and political presence, though observing the time-honoured practice in such situations of removing to the Siamese capital offspring or relatives of most of the local rulers as hostages.¹⁷¹⁾

It would seem, above all, to have been the events of the following few months in the Mekhong valley that really brought home to King Chulalongkorn and the Siamese elite generally, the urgency of the need to develop an administrative centralization policy. On the departure of the Siamese from Luang Phrabang, the Chin Haw reappeared, attacked and sacked the town, putting to rapid flight the local Siamese representatives. The Siamese ability to assert consistently their traditional-style authority in these regions was thereby called into question. The international implications were even worse, though. Auguste Pavie, the French Consul-designate for Luang Phrabang, had been allowed to set out for his post by the Siamese before they learnt of the French Assembly's rejection of the Comte de Kergaradec's arrangements. Pavie revelled in the Mekhong valley confusion of 1887, befriended the old,

166) P. Duke, *Les Relations entre la France et la Thaïlande*. Bangkok, 1962. 120.

167) cf. *supra*, 39.

168) Duke, *op. cit.*, 120-1.

169) Satow Diaries, 13th November 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/15/9.

170) *Ibid.*, 14th September, 14th October 1885.

171) cf. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Kyoto University. 1973. 311.

refugee Prince of Luang Phrabang, soon obtained a substitute official position as French Commissioner for establishing the Vietnam-Lao border, and built up a small, but able and adventurous team of Frenchmen who developed a much better knowledge of the lie of the land than the Siamese had ever possessed, and of great value in representing the rival suzerain claims inherited by France from Vietnam.¹⁷²⁾ The pressure was truly on, and was to culminate in the Paknam Incident of 1893, and the French annexation of all trans-Mekhong Laos.

Yet the Siamese response was in progress in the meanwhile, however belatedly. And it served ultimately, no doubt, to prevent the French from establishing themselves permanently on the Mekhong west bank too. In the aftermath of the Luang Phrabang debacle, King Chulalongkorn despatched there a permanent commissioner who, according to the Siamese Acting Foreign Minister, was to "assume the direct administration of Luang Phrabang, leaving the Chief only a nominal authority."¹⁷³⁾ This was no mere duplication of the earlier Chiangmai model, even of Phichit's time, but a positive new step forward. And it was soon applied to all the main Eastern Lao towns, culminating in the appointment of princely High Commissioners in 1890 to Luang Phrabang, Nongkhai and Champassak. Phichit returned to the field at Champassak, strategically the most critical post as it turned out in 1893, *vis-a-vis* the French, but in the brief interval before, gave the major lead in asserting Siamese control, standardizing the local government infrastructure, corvee, and taxation systems. Even after his return to Bangkok in 1893 to take over the Ministry of Justice, thereby leaving the way open for Chulalongkorn's young favourite, Prince Damrong, to assert his authority as the new Minister of the Interior, many of the innovations subsequently introduced, particularly by Prince Sanphasit at Khorat, perhaps owed as much to Phichit's pre-Chiangmai plans of 1884 as to knowledge since gained of, for instance, British administrative methods in Burma.¹⁷⁴⁾

Yet this *volte-face* in Siamese policy must not be attributed entirely to the Luang Phrabang debacle. Its very violence indicates that thinking had already been changing in the Siamese capital, at least during 1886-7, and that the Mekhong troubles represented rather a *point d'appui*. It was presumably in late 1886 that the King decided to summon a great, and probably unprecedented Indian-style 'darbar' of dependent Princes and chiefs to Bangkok early in the following year.¹⁷⁵⁾ This was to celebrate the installation of Chulalongkorn's son, Wachirunhit, as Crown Prince, a significant enough break with tradition in itself, with the abolition of the old post of *Uparat*, but it must also have proved an opportunity to convey to those attending

172) Their activities and discoveries are fully documented in the monumental *Mission Pavie*. 11 Vols. Paris 1898-1904.

173) Gould to Lord Salisbury, 10th July 1887. F.O. 69/117.

174) Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 111 stresses the British influence.

175) Described by Satow to Salisbury, 31st January 1887. F.O. 69/115.

some idea of other imminent changes. By April 1887, the King was informing the inner governing circle of his intention to commence preparations for cabinet, if not constitutional-style government. And he demonstrated his commitment by sending off to Europe in the company of the returning British Minister, Satow, his formerly indispensable adviser, Prince Devawongse, to investigate the different Western models of government.¹⁷⁶⁾

This, of all King Chulalongkorn's, moves, was perhaps the most critical, coming at the precise moment that it did, and certainly was surprising enough after the negativity of the preceding years. Responsibility for it seems equally attributable to the criticisms of foreigners; Siam seems to have been enjoying a poor press, for instance, during the 1880's, stemming particularly from its refusal to grant concessions for railway, telegraph and canal construction; the rising crescendo of demands from the King's younger brothers, who expected to share power if they were to aid in the preservation of the country, and perhaps the encouragement of the same Ernest Satow. An unusually sympathetic and helpful British diplomat, he was able to draw on his own lengthy experience of Japan to portray that country as a model Siam might copy, and his determined fight against even British Straits Settlements officials to preserve Siamese territorial integrity, dependencies and all,¹⁷⁷⁾ ensured him the confidence of the King. Thus, just at a time when Britain might have been tempted to write Siam off as a logical future beneficiary of the French *mission civilisatrice*, the country's leaders began to assert clearly that it had a future, and Satow, returning to London, was able to impress this on his own Government. After Devawongse's return, an actual cabinet was formed, though for a while it operated more in a 'shadow' sense, its members only gradually taking over specific functional responsibilities from the old *Senabodi* ministries amongst whom they had hitherto been distributed. It was not to be until 1892 that the cabinet was given official form by royal decree, and a degree of collective responsibility, or that Damrong took over the *Mahatthai*, or Interior Ministry.¹⁷⁸⁾

In the meanwhile, nevertheless, the sense of urgency behind the administrative reorganization of the North-east began to be paralleled in other parts of the periphery. As has already been mentioned, the British Home Government remained throughout this period opposed to territorial accessions at the expense of Siam, but that did not stop British Malayan officials looking covetously at the Siamese Malay states, and showing sympathy with the French 'spheres of influence' idea.¹⁷⁹⁾ Perhaps realising

176) Satow Diaries, 7th April 1887. P. R. O. 30/33/15/11, and Siffin, *The Thai Bureaucracy*, 58.

177) Loh, *The Malay States*, 65. Even the King's later travelling about incognito (cf. Prachoom, *op. cit.*, 154-7) may originally have been suggested by Satow-Diaries, 28th November 1885. P. R. O. 30/33/15/10.

178) For a translation of the decree, cf. *Bangkok Times*, 8th June 1892.

179) Governor Weld to Satow, 17th June 1886. P.R.O. 30/33/2/9.

that Satow's successors at the Bangkok Legation were unlikely to be as effective defenders of Siam's interests in the Peninsula, Chulalongkorn himself paid a couple of visits to the area in 1888 and 1890 to prepare the ground for the appointment of Commissioners there too.¹⁸⁰⁾ On the other hand, the punches were always rather pulled here, for instance the appointment of the Sultans of Kedah as High Commissioners, perhaps as much in recognition of the very marked religious and cultural differences between Muslim Malay and Buddhist Thai, as of British commercial and political interest.

It was not, after all, in recognition of the strong British commercial and political interest in Western Laos that the last pre-1892 Siamese initiative there ground to a halt. Certainly, by 1892, the region had slipped far from its significance of a decade before in terms of Siamese policy-making, although up to about 1890 developments had followed a very similar course to those in the states of Eastern Laos. *Phraya* Montri Suriyawong had remained as Siamese Commissioner until 1887, but had then departed to become Siamese Minister in Paris, and been replaced by *Phraya* Phet Phichai (Chin Charuchinda). The latter commenced anew the policy of interfering in local revenue collection, and with Inthanon ageing rapidly, and younger, more able *Chao* blocked from promotion, it was soon being predicted that the old man would be the last Prince of Chiangmai, perhaps even be retired down to Bangkok within his lifetime.¹⁸¹⁾ When, in 1888, Prince Sonapandit was sent up to Chiangmai to take overall control, it would seem to have been merely to supply the *coup de grace*. In the event, Sonapandit's role proved disastrous, contributing strongly to the clearest expression of popular discontent and resentment Siamese centralization policies had yet met with, the *Phraya* Pap rebellion of 1889-90.¹⁸²⁾

A major underlying factor behind this rebellion, and an explanation of the character of its leadership, was the increasing exclusion of the more junior Lao officials and local leaders from government, and thus access to their traditional perquisites, as a result of the working of the 'State Council and Six Ministers'. The *Phrachao*'s own ostentatious display of wealth, as in his building of a new Rs. 100,000 palace around this time,¹⁸³⁾ and the knowledge also that more and more was going into Siamese pockets, hardly improved their feelings. But the more general resentment

180) Thamsook Numnonda, *The Anglo-Siamese Negotiations, 1900-1909*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, London 1966. 53.

181) Archer to Gould, 12th November 1888. F. O. 69/123. The able *Chao* Rachasamphan had been held in Bangkok since 1883.

182) The most detailed account and explanation of the rebellion appears in Archer to Gould, 10th October 1889. F. O. 69/123. cf. also 'Telegraphists in Siam' letter in *Bangkok Times*, 6th September 1893, and Acting Vice-Consul Stringer to Captain Jones, 20th March 1890. F. O. 628/200. Siamese sources on this affair are curiously deficient.

183) O. Ehlers, *Im Sattel durch Indochina*. Berlin 1894. I, 148.

they were able to exploit derived rather from Sonapandit's levying of Lao villagers to serve long stints on the Burma border; this in connection with Siamese attempts to dispute British claims to the whole of the Salween valley;¹⁸⁴⁾ imposing new taxes, and specifically that on the highly valued betel-tree, and his bringing in Chinese tax-collectors, and failing to supervise satisfactorily their collection of the tax.¹⁸⁵⁾ Briefly, in September 1889, Chiangmai city itself was besieged, with Sonapandit and Inthanon penned up inside. But the other *Chao* failed to give support, *Phraya* Pap himself, a local hero, and his associates lost heart, their forces melted away, and a later, also brief revival in 1890 was prompted principally by encouragement from the Shan State of Kengtung.

Yet, in conjunction with the Bangkok Government's preoccupations in Eastern Laos and the Peninsula, the *Phraya* Pap rebellion, and its international implications, had the important effect of virtually halting further Siamese interference in Western Laos for some seven or eight years. The international implications of the rebellion resulted from the British Indian Government's rather belated decision in early 1890 to assume the suzerainty rights over the Shan States east of the Salween it had inherited from the old Burmese kingdom back in 1886. The principal of these states was Kengtung, and although the British at once intervened to extinguish further Shan support for *Phraya* Pap,¹⁸⁶⁾ their new geographical proximity and obvious awareness of the disturbed condition of Western Laos at this time re-aroused all the old Siamese apprehensions of British intervention.¹⁸⁷⁾ With Bangkok simultaneously desiring British support against the far more greatly feared French in the north-east, it was not at all surprising that Siamese policy reverted to one of wooing Britain with a series of concessions; a compromise of the rival border claims, major new forest leases for the big British teak companies, and the withdrawal of Prince Sonapandit from Chiangmai.¹⁸⁸⁾

184) Ney Elias to Secretary to Indian Government, 5th February 1890. F.O. 69/139. Although the Indian Government in mid-1888, decided to insist on its title to five east-bank Shan villages, and in mid-1889 proposed a joint Border Commission to investigate both sides' claims to eastbank territory opposite Karenni and Mawmai, the Siamese refused to participate in the Commission and had to be forcibly expelled from the territory in late 1889, with much attendant ill-feeling. cf. Memo by Viceroy Lansdowne, 1891. Ney Elias Papers.

185) Archer to Gould, 12th November 1888. F.O. 69/123.

186) J.G. Scott's, Shan States Weekly Summary, 29th March 1890. IFP (India Foreign Proceedings), Vol. 3739.

187) Expressed, for instance, in the Government-subsidized *Bangkok Times* editorial of 11th June 1890.

188) The boundary problems were finally settled by a new joint commission in 1892-3, an important achievement in removing a major potential contentious issue. The Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation got going in the teak industry around this time, while the pioneer American, Dr. Marion Cheek, was effectively squeezed out. Cheek to U. S. Minister Barrett, 29th January 1895. DUSMB (Despatches of U. S. Ministers, Bangkok), IV.

Thus, while the central government's administrative take-over in the north-east was henceforth being pursued with the maximum expedition by the princely High Commissioners there, and even railway connections were planned in face of the French threat, Chiangmai reverted to relative placid calm under the unobtrusive guidance of the returned *Phraya* Thep, now *Chaophraya Phonlathep*, nominal Minister of Lands. A couple of years later, as mentioned above, Prince Damrong was transferred to the Ministry of the North. Although his ultimately dominant administrative role was probably by no means visualized by the King or anyone else at that stage,¹⁸⁹⁾ his prompt appointment of an old and close friend, *Phraya* Song Suradet (An Bunnag), to replace *Chaophraya Phonlathep* at Chiangmai suggested one of his earliest intended initiatives. However, the international situation remained a major hindrance to action. The settlement of the Paknam crisis of 1893 gave the French control of the whole of the Mekhong valley east bank right up opposite to the states of Nan and Chiangmai, and in subsequent years the French attempted to incite the Lao in the twenty-five kilometre west-bank zone against the Siamese, who had been required to withdraw all their officials from there.¹⁹⁰⁾ There was too, continuing dispute between the British and French over the alignment of their joint frontier immediately north of Western Laos, while King Chulalongkorn himself remained in a state of severe depression for a couple of years after Paknam, unable to afford much personal backing to any administrative changes.¹⁹¹⁾

Thus, the next stage of governmental centralization saw Damrong turning from the periphery to apply the ideas developed there to Siam Proper. Provinces were standardized and grouped in 'circles' under 'Superintendent Commissioners' with all sorts of specialist assistants; the *Thesaphiban* system of local government.¹⁹²⁾ As for Chiangmai and Western Laos, it was not until the aftermath of the Anglo-French treaty of 1896, and the secret Anglo-Siamese agreement of the same year, between them guaranteeing the inviolability of the central Chaophraya valley,¹⁹³⁾ that the Siamese regained sufficient confidence to attempt to repeat the Sonapandit initiative, and this time achieve success. Inthanon's death in 1897 was an added bonus, and the years 1897-1902 saw a rapid Siamese take-over of forest supervision, revenue collection, judicial and police authority, and ultimately the whole system of civil

189) To Prince Prachak, the King felt bound to claim that "I therefore want you to consider him as the King's Secretary, whom the King has entrusted with certain jobs," (Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 135) while Damrong himself has recorded his surprize at being given the appointment. cf. Damrong and Rachasena, *Thesaphiban*. Bangkok 1960. 5-6.

190) Archer to British Minister, De Bunsen, 12th February 1896. F. O. 628/245.

191) Robert Morant's Memorandum, July 1894. F. O. 17/1223, and Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*. 96.

192) Damrong and Rachasena, *op. cit.*, and Siffin, *op. cit.*

193) Chandran Jeshurun, "The Anglo-French Declaration of January 1896 and the Independence of Siam," *JSS*, LVIII (1970), 2, 106.

administration. When a last show of local resistance erupted in 1902, in the form of the so-called 'Shan Rebellion', its initial success proved no pointer to its ultimate chances. A *Shan* rising it does indeed seem to have been, organized by temporary immigrants, itinerant British Subject miners and traders, with only minimal support from the Lao themselves at all social levels.¹⁹⁴⁾ Rather than offering a serious threat to the Siamese position in Western Laos, the rebellion merely highlighted initially, how small a military presence the Siamese had hitherto required in support of their civil officials, and then, with new Siamese armies rushed up, provided the opportunity and the iron fist necessary to round off administrative control. It was to take many years more of Bangkok-operated cultural, social, educational and other programmes to instil any real feeling of Thai consciousness in the Lao people, and it was not to be until the Bangkok Revolution of 1932 that the *Chao* in the various states¹⁹⁵⁾ were to lose even their nominal role as originally defined in Phichit's 'State Council and Six Ministers' scheme. In practice, however, they had mostly been virtual cyphers since *Phrachao* Inthanon's death in 1897.¹⁹⁶⁾

What this essay seeks to document, therefore, is the strength of the Thai socio-political structure in the nineteenth century, and its resistance to the impact and demands of the very different West, even at one of its weakest and most vulnerable points, the Bangkok-Chiangmai tributary relationship.

As one would expect with any elaborate non-European culture or society, threatened by a far more dynamic and militarily powerful rival, Thailand's need was to adapt to survive. Some Asian states enjoyed particular advantages; China, her formidable size, Japan, Afghanistan and Persia, like Siam to some extent, their remoteness. But so long as Western missionary activities were restricted, commercial interests unprotected, or diplomatic initiatives ignored, Western supremacists would enjoy the necessary atmospheres of distrust within which to work, and actual incidents to exploit as *casus belli*. Thus the majority of Asian states failed to avoid falling under Western rule, and now, two decades into the post-colonial era, are still seeking to re-establish their own identities.

Yet too often have Westerners conceived of the alternative adaptation in purely Western terms; of following the Western example of economic and social development. Too few have both recognized and bothered to assess the psychological tightrope needing to be walked in adaptation from weakness. How temperamentally unsatisfying was mere imitation of the West has been indicated on the grandest scale by

194) T.H. Lyle to Vice-Consul Beckett, 21st August 1902. F.O. 628/279.

195) With the exception of Phre on which the Shan Rebellion had centred, where the *Chao* had been dispossessed, and the State turned into a part of Inner Siam in late 1902, apparently as a warning to the other Lao hierarchies.

196) Vice-Consul Black to Stringer, May 1900 in F.O. 628/267.

modern China. But her evolution to a new political form, owing motivationally and morally at least, little enough to the West, has taken her through foreign wars, rebellions, two revolutions and decades of civil war. Japan took a different route, undergoing a political reorganization voluntarily and exceptionally early in terms of the East-West impact, but has still suffered many a trial and tribulation since, culminating in Hiroshima and the American occupation before the development of a new stability.

No people, presented with the choice, could have opted for such experiences surely, and certainly not the inhabitants of a so much smaller country like Thailand, with no hope of ultimate 'Great Power' status, and the world role and significance it could signify. She had no real choice but to walk the tightrope. The result would have been the same had she fallen either side. It was traditionalist pride and self-satisfaction that produced the almost blind Vietnamese resistance to the West that soon led to that country's destruction. But equally, over rapid imitation of the West could create such strains in society, between conservatives and reformers, and such a breakdown in effective government, that even if it did not end in open civil war, as it virtually did in Korea, the Powers would still probably have intervened to restore the semblance of law and order.

But if the tightrope had to be the answer, besides her relatively isolated geographical situation, Siam enjoyed other advantages *vis-a-vis* her neighbours; sociologically, the people, at least of Siam Proper, having seemingly a clearer sense of common identity, which had expressed itself in the rapid revival of the later eighteenth century following the destruction of Ayuthya; historically, in not reaching the *apogée* of Chakri dynastic power until immediately prior to the real Western impact, perhaps around 1845, the year of the defeat of the old Vietnamese enemy in Cambodia; and also, as Vella stresses,¹⁹⁷⁾ in her elite's general awareness of the outside world, living as they did, uniquely amongst all mainland East Asians, in a seaport capital. Perhaps the last in part explains the pragmatism that was and is a fairly well developed characteristic of Thai society generally.

All these factors tended to make the tightrope policies less self-conscious and more natural, but there were still disagreements. Examples there were in Siam of hasty, even passionate Westernizers for their respective times, perhaps Mongkut's brother, Itsaret, whose claims to the throne were overruled in 1851, reportedly¹⁹⁸⁾ partly for this very reason, or the Western Legations group of Prince-diplomats, who presented the petition for governmental reform from London and Paris in 1885. Theirs were vital roles, without which the impetus for the necessary change might not have been kept alive. Equally, there were the unquestioning conservatives, prob-

197) W. F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III*. 143.

198) W. L. Cowan, "The Role of Prince Chuthamani in the Modernizing of Siam," *JSS*, LV, 59.

ably the great majority of the older officials and members of the royal family, who had little conception of the international situation Siam found herself in, but who were no more used to questioning the lead that came from the top, provided that it was clear and consistent.

So much thus depended upon the figures who played the dominant political roles in Siam between 1851 and 1910, Mongkut, Si Suriyawong and Chulalongkorn. None of the three should be seen as straightforward, thorough-going reformers. When not subordinating their true feelings to the exigencies of a particular political situation, they stood in between the two extreme groups, and not simply due to their status. While, on the one hand, they were men of quite broad interests, only Chulalongkorn enjoyed more than limited personal experience of the outside world, and he not until his first European tour in 1897. In maturity, each seems to have feared or resented the idea of a radical transformation of Thai society quite as much as they feared the danger of a Western take-over (if not more), and for the Kings, father and son, certainly, there was much personal agonizing through the years over this question. No doubt they could have pushed reform through rather quicker without too much short-term stress, or even the loss of trans-Mekhong Laos, had they not been the men they were. But they had achieved their eminence because of their particular backgrounds and characters,¹⁹⁹⁾ and the sort of long-term psychological gulf that might have resulted from such action is incalculable.

Even so, these three figures, by avoiding military confrontation and thus personal humiliation, and through occasional success in scoring points off the West, as in 1879, were able for decades to maintain governmental prestige within the country, and keep their options open for political initiatives, however reluctant. After the premature promise of 1873-4, these multiplied from the late 1880's onwards, and by the late 1890's, the majority of the Siamese elite, including Chulalongkorn himself, seem to have resolved the cultural conflict in their minds to some degree of satisfaction and purpose. The changes made, above all the administrative centralization, concentrated power increasingly in the hands of the royal family certainly, but only with the assistance of an increasingly modern-trained and specialized bureaucracy and army, which, within themselves, nevertheless preserved very largely the traditional-style lines of authority, responsibility and loyalty. And, as Siffin points out,²⁰⁰⁾ when, by 1932, the royal family had lost its earlier educational lead, and the crisis of the

199) As has been suggested, the succession was not a straightforward, hereditary, primogenital process, but perhaps the most contentious issue in Siamese politics. Both were thus 'selected' by the State Council, dominated of course by the Bunnags, and thereafter remained subject to threat of murder or deposition. cf. Si Suriyawong's remark recorded by U. S. envoy Townsend Harris, and quoted by N. Tarling, "Harry Parkes' Negotiations in Bangkok in 1856," *JSS*, LIII, 180. fn. 57

200) Siffin, *op. cit.*, 149-150.

Western threat with which it had been dealing was quite over, officialdom, in the form of the new military-bureaucracy, once again asserted its dominance.

While being of quite vital importance in itself, the Bangkok-Chiangmai relationship illustrates so much of this. With the advent of the Western presence in mainland South East Asia, Western Laos, in so far as it genuinely was a part of traditional Siam, soon became an area Bangkok could lose, like Cambodia, and if Western Laos was to go, what else might follow?

By the early 1870's, Britain's interests in the area were considerable, in terms particularly of the involvement of her Burmese subjects in the teak trade, but her policy of supporting Bangkok's suzerain authority to ensure order and security still perhaps only one of first instance. If the Siamese Government had quite failed to assert itself, there must have been a real danger that the supremacists, in British Burma in particular, would have gained control of policy-making, and organized the annexation of Western Laos. Moreover, the fear in Bangkok of this eventuality, at least among Chulalongkorn's generation in the 1870's and early 1880's, was quite disproportionate to its likelihood.

Yet, as has been suggested, while it was above all with regard to Western Laos in the 1870's and early 1880's that ideas of Siamese administrative centralization began to be formed, it was still for the most part a highly reluctant development. There was indeed the early promise of the 1873 First (Indian) Chiangmai Treaty, and the despatch to Chiangmai the following year of the first, as it turned out, permanent Siamese Commissioner, but these initiatives have to be viewed against the background of the post-Regency struggle for power between Chulalongkorn and Si Suriyawong. And if genuine commitment to the extension of Siamese authority can be discerned in them, nevertheless subsequent events contrast with and characterize this brief period as one of, at most, mere youthful enthusiasm.

Thereafter, up to 1883, as the Siamese efforts at interference die away, the strength of the opposing forces of conservatism amongst both the Siamese and Lao elites form at least a good excuse for inaction. But from 1883 through to 1887, when, with reference now to Luang Phrabang, the ultimate aim of Siamese policy is for the first time asserted to be total control, the issue, as I have tried to show, lay in the balance. It was in these years that a now maturing Chulalongkorn, with real power at his fingertips, had to start resolving for himself the identity versus adaptability dilemma. They also precede the major outpourings from his pen of the 1890's and 1900's, so that we cannot follow his personal development very closely, major job in itself though it would be. Other Siamese were of course going through the same process contemporaneously, though with much less responsibility, and thus, in some cases, with much more abandon. Prince Phichit was evidently one such, until he was sent up to deal with the problems of Chiangmai. Indeed, he seems to have accepted

no significant modification of his views as a result of his stay in Chiangmai, and to have remained a convinced activist. To him, the Lao political hierarchy, following the demise of *Uparat* Bunthawong and *Phrachao* Inthanon's wife, Thiphakeson, were mere 'paper tigers'. Presumably, he also trusted in the backing of the British for what they had always encouraged and seen as the answer in hierarchical Thailand, a swift Siamese take-over of the local administration, at the risk of perhaps limited, short-term disorder.

Henceforth, therefore, Siam's relations with her dependencies formed a matter of real debate amongst the country's leaders, not merely as an aspect of foreign relations, but as a pointer to the development of the whole country. But as for Chulalongkorn, he had withdrawn Phichit from Chiangmai after a single year. At the very least, he had not been prepared to take the same risks as his half-brother advocated for the sake of limited financial advantage and the long-term security of Siamese control there. Furthermore, in 1885-6, he was evidently not holding out, even to his brothers, any promise of the development of a policy of intervention in the dependencies. In his view, all reform would have to stem from reorganization at the centre, Bangkok, and even that had as yet to wait, at least until the already admittedly defunct group of older officials passed on. What would be the outcome if all the *Senabodi* resigned at once? Such a thing had never happened before!²⁰¹⁾

If the King was now merely waiting on events, fortunately for Siam, they developed conveniently slowly. Above all, the French threat, which had of course really been with Siam ever since the early 1860's, still took some eight years to reach its final 1893 crisis from the time of the first demand for the Luang Phrabang Consulate. Fortunately too, in Ernest Satow, Britain had its most effective adviser and advocate for action on hand, and Phichit and his less-experienced brothers had the education and the specific ideas ready for application. Thus Chulalongkorn was finally persuaded to swing his influence behind the forces of change during 1887, and settle for sovereignty and territorial integrity as his prime considerations. His conception of the sort of national bureaucratic polity they were to lead to must still have been very dim.

Indeed, the years through to 1893 also saw steady loss of political control by the King, as his brothers asserted their own roles. Only around 1895-6, well after Paknam, and with the aid chiefly of Damrong, did he seem to regain it, along with new self-confidence,²⁰²⁾ never again to loose the reins until his death. But if Chiangmai and the rest of Western Laos were now to be absorbed into the national Thai

201) Chai-Anan, *op. cit.*, 95.

202) Expressed regarding the role of the *Mahatthai*, on similar lines to the 1885 petition, in a letter to Prince Damrong of 18th January 1896. Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 142. cf. also Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*. 197-8.

system, and the old hierarchies be submerged, elements of local identity were still to survive the later years of the 'Absolute Monarchy', to revive again post-1932 along with the traditional style of wider elite governmental operation, referred to above. The fact that it is a home-grown solution means that the new, modern Northern elite know and understand their albeit much more subordinate role quite as well as their early nineteenth century predecessors, unlike in Burma, for instance, where Burmans and Shans have had to set about relearning the realities of their interdependence in the post-independence period. The adequacy of the new Bangkok-Chiangmai relationship as an answer to some of the modern problems of the country may be questionable, but it still contributes to the vital attributes of stability and confidence in their future that the Thai possess in as full a measure as any of their excolonialized neighbours.